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ABSTRACT

The role of the media in our daily lives is discussed and its potential applications in the second language classroom are examined. Evidence of the power of the mass media is noted in the impact of news coverage on the news itself, and in the immediacy of news coverage. Video is also seen as stimulating and appealing to many, and able to reflect real life and real interaction better than other media. It is suggested that video use in the language classroom be used in small doses, no more than 5 minutes at a time, and be focused on a single task such as vocabulary recognition. Teachers are encouraged to look into the use of both prepared video materials and classroom-developed videos involving student performance. (MSE)

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ENHANCING QUALITY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY: THE CASE FOR VIDEO

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A paper presented at the
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Introduction

Walk down the streets of Hong Kong and you will soon see shops bulging and blaring with audio and video equipment, from Walkmen, Discmen, and tiny TVs to giant karaoke equipment. The roofs of our homes and even our schools have satellite dishes (or small or large ears as the Chinese expression goes). Now we not only watch, but we can record those programs for later viewing on our VCRs, and we can even make our own programs on hand-held video cameras. Much of the equipment is affordable, especially at the school level, and particularly in the "Little Dragons" or NICs of East Asia.

Video is all around us, so today I am going to explore some ideas concerning its use in the classroom. First, I'm going to talk about some of the effects of video on our daily lives and some characteristics of video as they relate to the theme of this conference--how judicious use of video in the language classroom can improve the quality of our teaching and our students' learning. Then, lest you get lost above the clouds among the orbiting satellites, I'll show some specific examples from off-

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air video and from the classroom.

Background

One morning this past September in my home in Taiwan I turned on the TV news from NHK Tokyo and saw on the ZDF news from Germany a report on the fighting in Yugoslavia--a small town in which a dear friend of mine lives was mentioned as an area of new fighting that day. When the lovely old city of Dubrovnik was being destroyed day by day, I saw bombed out neighborhoods where friends used to live.

Or just think back to the unsuccessful coup in the former Soviet Union last August. During the second day, ABC's Diane Sawyer interviewed the President of the Russian Republic Boris Yeltsin, who was staying in the Russian Parliament building. As Sawyer was leaving, she said to Yeltsin something like "We'll talk to you again tomorrow." Yeltsin gave a typical Slav reply "If I'm still alive then," only this time it was not a casual conversational phrase, but a statement close to the truth. Very possibly he would not be alive twenty-four hours later, though fortunately for him and the rest of the world he was.

What a powerful medium the television is! Forty years ago we in the US were laughing at Burns and Allen or The Jack Benny Program and following the adventures of The Lone Ranger in fuzzy black and white. Now we sit through the crises of the world the way we keep vigil at the bedside of a sick friend. TV is still an entertainment box, but it is also like a visual telephone as it brings us messages from our world neighbors. So powerful that

politicians and advertisers attempt to use it for their own purposes: just think of how many protest signs you see written in English in non-English speaking countries.

A powerful medium. Whenever something happens in the world, we hear about it almost immediately through CNN or the BBC via our new Asia satellite. Experts attempt to determine the effects of this live, instantaneous coverage on us, the viewers. Did seeing live bombs exploding in Baghdad or Tel Aviv make us more sensitive or less sensitive to the horrors of war? Was it like a live-action video game, just a game? A recent issue of Time asked another pertinent question: does instant media coverage speed events up so that we have no time to think of their meaning?

I think I've made my point that TV has a great influence upon us and its effects are not likely to diminish. In addition to regular TV, cable TV, satellite TV, we can also rent or purchase movies to watch in our homes or buy video games to play on our TV screens. Young people in Hong Kong as well as Taiwan watch MTV channels and frequent MTV parlors. Indeed, our children are more familiar and comfortable with this equipment than we are. Video hardware and software are abundant and affordable. So, with video all around us and particularly around our students, there is no reason not to take advantage of its benefits and adapt it for classroom use.

Some Characteristics of Video

Our theme for this conference centers around the concept of

quality. I won't attempt to define it; we've already heard several definitions, and I'm sure that in this room there are as many definitions of quality in it as there are people, perhaps even more. Rather, I will mention various characteristics of video and later we can ask whether they relate in a broad way to quality in teaching and learning.

Video can be immediate, as with news programs. We see events as they happen, the bombs falling on Baghdad only a few hours after they really fell. Some events come to us live from the other side of the world. It can also be interactive, immediately so in interactive video, a bit delayed in the real world. In autumn 1991 the BBC reported on the plight of Albanian children by showing the bad conditions in one orphanage. Viewers in Britain, moved by the report, sent in donations. Soon truckloads of supplies, even toys, were on their way, and when the goods were delivered, the BBC reported the receipt of the goods, the consequence of the first story.

Radio and newspapers can also be interactive, but not with the same immediacy. Radio lacks the visual representation of bloodshed, famine, natural disaster. Newspapers are limited to the usually less emotional still frame. What newspapers lack in up-to-dateness (stories may be several hours or even days old), they can make up for in depth. Newspapers can dig beneath the surface, speculate on motives, effects, etc. News analysis programs (e.g. Panorama, 60 Minutes, Inside Edition) also take some of this role, but the written word still has its purpose, and we tend to analyze newspaper articles more critically,

perhaps because we can go back and read it again "in black and white", whereas the TV message is spoken and gone, and because we have to do more work to read than to watch TV, so we tend to pay more attention to writing. Besides, it's easier to carry the newspaper with us and nibble at it or digest it at our own convenience along with a cup of coffee.

Video is appealing. It has color and movement. It accosts eyes and ears with many simultaneous messages. There is something for everybody, often too much. Do you ever feel tired watching a music video or a police chase scene? There seems to be too much information to process at once. On the other hand, the same or a similar message is coming to us in many forms: characters not only speak, but the whole setting, the clothing, body language, and so on, are contributing to the message. We see an extreme on the verbal end of this--repetition, in soap operas, where you may hear a fight between husband and wife (in the first and second person, present and past tense) in one episode, and in succeeding episodes the wife describing the fight to her mother (first and third person, past and past perfect), the husband paraphrasing his version to his brother (first and third person, past and past perfect), and the neighbors telling and asking each other about that noisy fight (third person, past and past perfect) and speculating on its causes or effects. Here you have examples of all sorts of paraphrase, reported speech, hypothetical situations, and so on.

The fact that video presents its material in many forms simultaneously gives it characteristics close to real life. We use more than words to communicate. Think of what happens when

you travel to a foreign country whose language you do not understand at all; you still learn a lot by what you see. Or think of place where you speak a little of the language and you go to a ocal shop to buy some small necessity. You are successful because you do not depend entirely on words, but on gestures, facial expressions, and a lot of guessing. Except for the fact that the TV cannot talk back to us and ask us questions, we do virtually the same things when we watch video. We attend to several areas at once in order to attach meaning to what we see. Sometimes we guess wrong, but that's life, and, as in real life, we soon find out that our hypothesis was incorrect and then we revise it.

We could turn our argument around and say that video makes us lazy because it robs us of our own imagination. When we listen to a radio program, we have to imagine the visual. When we read a novel, we have to work even harder. In that sense, the more we work, the more the product is uniquely our very own.

We've probably all had the experience of seeing a favorite novel dramatised years later. Were you disappointed or annoyed at having your personal characters replaced with the director's? I must admit my Miss Marple looked a little like my Great Aunt Katie, but Joan Hickson is good, and no Poirot could be as humpty-dumpty egg-shaped as David Suchet. Yet, has video taken something away from us?

Let's extend this line of thought to music. Whenever we hear music, when we attend to it, not just ignore the typical elevator and doctor's office music, although psychologists tell

us it plays a role in keeping us calm, in preventing mass panic; it's a kind of opiate. When we hear music, we see images on the little TV screens in our brains and feel sensations or memories in other parts of our bodies. An old song may remind us of what we were doing back then, even bring back old feelings. It may excite us, emotionally stimulate us. Fast music makes us feel energetic, slower music more relaxed. So a piece of music can conjure up our lying on a sunny beach, walking through an Oriental market, dancing at a town festival. We make up our own music videos in our minds. What does commercial music video do to our imagined ones?

Yet movies, TV, music videos are contemporary art forms. We cannot ignore them. Each director has the right to his own interpretation. The problem is, how do we experience other interpretations without stifling our own? How do we keep mass culture in its place? Some schools teach media literacy; perhaps we ought to remember to include in it some sort of video literacy.

Using Video in the Classroom

Bringing a technological tool into the classroom is like bringing home a new baby. The wife and husband change their roles toward each other in order to accommodate the baby; teachers and students have to break out of their traditional roles in order to interact with the technology effectively. How can we redefine those roles?

The teacher's role does not really change when the VCR is turned on. For those teachers who have a limited or mistaken

view of the role of video, the teacher gives up his role as teacher when he rewards the students or fills in a free time slot with a full-length movie. Students may sleep, read only the subtitles, or have language input overload after a certain time and just tune out. Not much learning has taken place.

Video practitioners tell us to use no more than a 5-minute clip at one time, ideally 1 to 3 minutes. Students are focused on a particular task, such as finding particular words or information. The same clip is usually watched a minimum of three times, each time for a new task or to check on the accuracy of the previous task. The teacher is in control and in the teacher role. He follows his lesson plan and turns the VCR on and off accordingly. It is another aid, like the audio cassette player. The only difference is that the linguistic and cultural input comes from another course besides the teacher. Nevertheless, the teacher is right there aiding the students' comprehension.

Students have to get used to getting input, getting information from another source besides the teacher. They already use books and audiotapes. It's one more medium, but they need guidance from the teacher in how to use it effectively, particularly if they want to use it for self study.

The extra medium means they have more listening comprehension with native speakers of all varieties of English. ELT video and particularly authentic video not only provide good speakers who have standard and clear pronunciation (TV anchorpersons, for example) but also ordinary speakers, ordinary people with all their elisions and pause fillers.

Think of the wonderful materials available all around us. Right here in Hong Kong and in Taiwan, too, we can watch STAR-TV, Satellite Television, Asian Region. We have the best BBC English along with standard and nonstandard Scots and Irish varieties, even programs in which we hear Indians, Malaysians, and many other native and nonnative speakers using English in various professional contexts. And we even have American programs--entertainment, sports, MTV. There are so many materials available for listening comprehension practice.

There's a lot of good material coming out on using video in the classroom. Many of the publishers of ELT videos are represented here at this conference. For off-air, authentic video, Stempleski's and Tomalin's Video in Action sets up specific lessons you can use--from movie excerpts, serials, TV sit-coms, even TV commercials. Tim Murphey and Janet Louise have talked about using music videos. Ulrike Meinhof has a book with accompanying video coming out on how to use news broadcasts.

[VIDEO EXCERPT 1 HERE]

Some of my own papers have dealt with taking a video camera into the classroom and using it to record various speaking activities (role plays, mini-plays, speeches, and so on) and for student evaluation. Let me show you an example.

[VIDEO EXCERPT 2 HERE]

I think you can see the advantages here. The teacher can evaluate the student more thoroughly and the student can evaluate herself and try to better her own performance. The student is not so much competing with others as competing with herself, trying to improve upon past performances. Teacher and student can discuss each student's individual speaking problems and find ways to improve upon them. Teaching and learning is indeed individualized.

Professionals actors and athletes use this technique, so do teacher trainers. Many of our students become teachers; some are even teaching part-time in cram schools now. Some others may become bilingual secretaries or translators. Most will have to use spoken English in their future professions or for leisure travel, so skill in presenting their ideas in English is indeed useful, even necessary.

Another characteristic of video we have not yet mentioned is that it's fun. Video is associated with leisure, with play, with relaxation, not work. Showing students how they can use leisure tools to improve language skills catches their interest, which in turn raises their motivation. Furthermore, if you record students and they see themselves on TV, they tend to spend more time in preparation and to do a better job. With most speaking activities, they speak and it's gone. When you record, both you and the students have a tangible product to analyze, enjoy, and be proud of.

Concluding Remarks

We must rethink the role of the media, video in particular. It's not just entertainment, but a learning device. It can be part of a language lab. Audiotapes are still good practice and cheap and reliable and easy to produce. But with audio only students must know what it is they are doing. It's harder; there are fewer clues, which is why students complain about authentic radio programs.

Video has more clues to understanding; it may even include words and diagrams. We can also teach nonverbal behavior and other points of culture. In addition, it's appealing, it's fun. And if we have access to all this English language around us, why not put it to use for us in our classrooms?

Some of you may already be using video in your English teaching. I could indeed learn many techniques from you; we can share our approaches. For those of you who have never used video, I hope my talk today has provided you with some new ideas.

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